

In his absence

Story: In his absence

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Summary: Justin's in college, and his absence is making Alex fall in love with him. Sweet fairytale- no villains, no angst, no problems. But definitely a healthy dose of JALEX holiday romance!

***Chapter 1*: Prologue**

Disclaimer: I don't own wowp.

This one's a sweet jalex. Enjoy :)

Prologue

When she had opened her eyes for the very first time, there was one person that she had noticed- him. He was hovering over her, staring at her with gray eyes that gleamed with awe, admiration, curiosity and questions. She had stared back at him for around ten seconds, with big brown eyes that looked as curious as his, before she closed her eyes again and fell asleep in her mother's arms. He had kept staring at her in wonder, until his eyes gleamed with love.

That was their mother's version of the story. His version was a bit different. He claimed that he did not remember any of it, but he did remember that he was never happy to see his little sister.

The faint smile on his lips begged to differ though...

December 2010

She opened her eyes to the shrill ringing of her alarm clock, glaring at the red digits like that would shut it up. With a groan and a yawn, she finally got out of bed, out of the cozy blankets that made her feel safe and protected.

She dragged her feet across the cold marble floor, wincing at the chilling touch and cursing her slippers for being out of her sight, opened the door of the bathroom with a fumbling hand, and sleepily reached for her toothbrush.

That's when she blinked. There were just five toothbrushes, hanging side by side. *His* toothbrush wasn't standing next to hers, like it had been doing, since the day he had grown tall enough to reach that shelf. *He* wasn't next to her.

Six months, and it still shocked her every day. Six months, and she still couldn't believe he was in college. Six months, and she still thought someone would be pounding at the bathroom door that very moment, yelling at her to get out. Six months, and she still absent-mindedly turned the geyser off.

Six months, and she still couldn't ignore his absence.

"Happy birthday!" The whole family yelled as she came down the stairs, still in her pajamas, still with messy hair, still looking as tired as she did in the middle of her forced study sessions.

A smile tugged at her lips. The idea of turning eighteen suddenly made her feel happy. Now she could go wild without getting into trouble for that! "Thanks guys.... I saw your presents. They were really nice." The smile faded soon though, as she, once again, realized that one face, one voice, was missing.

"Awww! My baby grew up so fast!" Theresa cooed.

"My little girl is an adult now!" Jerry joined in, sniffling.

She whined. "Mom. Dad. I can't keep up this sweetness for long. So please, just stop!"

Theresa sighed. "Whatever you want sweetie. It's your day. Come on. Let's eat breakfast."

"So, what are you planning for today?" Harper asked.

"We are throwing you a special 18th birthday party this evening." Jerry informed. "But if there's something you want to do this afternoon, just let us know. – No magic."

She smiled sweetly at her father. "Can I start by killing off Justin?"

Her mother cringed, raising an eyebrow at her questioningly. "He forgot to wish you?"

She stabbed her spoon on her food, imagining that to be Justin's head. "You bet."

"I know you're mad but I can explain. Please! Just pick up the call! Alex!" he pleaded at the voice-mail in exasperation, desperately hoping that she wouldn't delete the message without listening.

She crossed her arms over her chest stubbornly, while the messages were being played. She still couldn't *believe* he had forgotten to wish her on her birthday! On her fifteenth birthday, he woke her up at 1 a.m. to wish her and annoy her at the same time, and she spent the rest of the night making him give her a back message. On her sixteenth birthday, he kept her up till the clock struck midnight, so that he could avoid the misfortune of the previous year. As soon as he wished, and she smacked him hard for keeping her up so long, she announced she was too tired to even stand up, and it was entirely his fault- her running around all day didn't count. So he had to carry her all the way up to her room, swallowing her insults quietly since it was her birthday. On her seventeenth birthday, he had taken her to the paint tunnel underground and let her draw peacefully, while he sat behind her, watching her work, and wondering when exactly she grew up.

And on her eighteenth birthday, he didn't call her in the morning to wish her? So what if they talked on the phone late last night and he had already wished her? She had every right to be mad at him! Although she wasn't sure why she was mad, and she was *definitely* not going to admit that she was actually upset that he wasn't with her on her birthday.

As her thoughts continued, the apologies kept playing. Fifteen messages and counting, his voice was getting more and more fearful. He actually sounded guilty, and worried. Maybe she *should* pick up his call. How long could she possibly be mad at him? Just yesterday, Harper had come running to her room to tell her about a boy who apparently committed suicide out of pressure and homesickness. Now where would she be if Justin did something so stupid like this?

"What do you want?" she hollered as soon as her phone rang the next time, angry at him for making her have these thoughts, and angry at herself for caring for him after he forgot to wish her on her birthday!

"My battery went dead- Hey, you hung up late last night- I'm sorry I couldn't wish you at morning." He blurted out in one breath, afraid she would hang up if he took too long.

"Apology not accepted." She growled. "Mom told me you aren't coming to my party tonight. Is that right?" she hung up before he could even answer.

He cursed at himself, dialing her number, and was once again greeted by her voice-mail. "Look I... you know how important exams are, right? *Okay, let me rephrase that.* You know how important exams are for me, right? *Wait. I sounded like a jerk. Okay...* I need to- *no.* I have to- Alex just pick up the phone!"

She smiled, listening to him admit that he was a jerk, while he mumbled incoherently. He became nervous so easily. Even when he was apologizing, he wanted to be annoyingly perfect. And annoying as he was, he was tolerable when he sounded so guilty and so vulnerable, like he would do anything she'd ask him to do.

The phone rang again, and she answered, forcing herself to sound annoyed. "What?"

"I have my exams next week. And I have college tomorrow." He sighed, thumb stroking his wallet by instinct, at the place where he kept the picture she drew for him on his seventh birthday. Would he ever be able to forgive himself for breaking her heart *on her birthday*? "I'm sorry Alex."

If a person could feel a slap to the chest or a bullet entering the middle of a soul, that's exactly what she felt at that moment. A huge load was placed on her chest, and it was weighing her life down. Before she knew it, unwanted tears were crowding in her eyes. Her voice cracked. "You are not gonna be here for my 18th birthday?"

"Alex-"

"-I was there on yours." She reminded, skipping the part where she had set up a stand-up comedy act to mimic how he played with his action figures, made him embarrassed, and had a huge fight with him that lasted two whole days. "Why won't you be there at my party, Justin?"

He bit his lip. How was he going to get out of this mess alive? He cleared his throat uncomfortably, looking at the sky and praying to whoever was listening that this worked. "I don't have to be there to be at the party."

She scrunched her nose in confusion. "What do you mean?" If he was going to say '*I'm with you all the time, in your heart*', he shouldn't blame her if she hung up again and answered his next call with a '*welcome to the 14th century cornyland*'.

"I can stand right here and see what you're doing now." He said instead, catching her off-guard.

She scoffed in disbelief. "Oh. *Please*."

"I get my Captain Jim Bob back-pack back?"

"You're on." She lied. If he ever believed she would give him back his things, and that too after he missed her 18th birthday party, he *deserved* to be lied to.

"Hmm... Let's see. You are rolling your eyes at me right now. Now you're making a face. You just opened your mouth to protest. Now you closed it again. You're chewing on your bottom lip now. You're looking away. Aah. Now you're smiling. Oh. And now you're blinking because everything I said was right." He narrated smoothly.

She blinked for another five seconds. "That was..."

He smirked. "Incredible?"

"No. Creepy." She looked around her, making sure that he actually wasn't standing somewhere in the room. "How could you *possibly* do that?"

He laughed. "Well, that's come with knowing you for eighteen miserable years of my life."

She joined in the laughter. Eighteen years of making his life miserable. "Justin..."

"No, Alex. It's your day. Go ahead. Have fun." he urged. "Don't cancel your party for me."

"I wasn't going to..." her voice trailed off uncertainly, her eyes widening in realization. She was *thinking* about canceling her party for *him*? And he knew that? Did he really know her *that* well?

"Happy birthday, Alex."

"Happy birthday!" Everyone yelled as soon as she cut the cake.

"Thanks guys." She mumbled through a mouthful, as she munched on the first slice. Her eyes instinctively darted to her right. The next bite was *always* his. But he wasn't there... he wouldn't be. She glanced at the door, feeling like he would walk in *any* moment and surprise her, like he did on her tenth birthday. Even though she knew he wasn't coming, she just kept hoping. After all, she was born in magic and miracles. She knew that *anything* could happen *anytime*. But the door never opened and the dorky-brother-un-charming never made his un-princely entrance and the exact-opposite-of-princess was left alone in the not-co-much-of-a-fairytale.

And the harsh reality struck her again. He wasn't there. He wasn't coming. He wasn't going to mimic how she blew out her candles, and she wasn't going to chase him through the house till either of them fell on the ground and injured him/her self.

A sudden hollow feeling gnawed at her chest. Suddenly, all the lights and the gifts and the guests and the cards seemed dull to her. Suddenly, the whole party seemed colorless. Heck, the whole world seemed colorless to her at that moment. The smile was fading, the sounds of laughter stopped echoing in her ears as she heard the distinct sound of what could only be her heart breaking.

She grabbed a plate from the side, placing the slice of cake on it. "Umm. I'll just take this up to my room. I need to get something. Excuse me. I'll be back soon." She ran away before anyone could ask any question, before anyone could catch *her* crying for *him* in public.

The door opened with a bang. She slammed the plate at her dresser, deciding that Justin deserved a rotten cake when he came back two-three-four-whatever (ten, exactly) days later, took off her shoes, throwing them to two opposite corners of the room, and sat down on her bed, sniffing.

"Gosh! Alex!" his reprimanding voice came from her room, as he jumped up in terror, and scolded, holding his book close to his chest as a shield. "You're scaring me!"

Her heart leapt in her chest at the sound of his voice. Was Justin making her delusional now? Or was he really there? She looked around her room, quickly finding him seated at her desk. He had probably been there for a while, and had probably been studying for his test while she partied downstairs and blessed the world with her wrath.

She stared at him, not believing her own eyes. "You're here." She quickly wiped away her tears, before he could start asking

questions and tease her later. She brushed aside her first instinct of running to his arms and crying her heart out. That's not how it's done Alex Russo style. First things first. First came revenge.

He shrugged, putting his book aside. "Well, I figured I should do something to make sure you don't kill-"

In one swift motion, the abandoned plate was in her hand and the cake was smashed on his face. "Now *this* is what I call rubbing it in your face." She laughed at her pun, licking the cream off her fingers, *finally* feeling a lot better. Honestly? She had felt better the moment her eyes met his, but she didn't give herself permission to admit that.

"Anything else?" he asked dryly, not at all amused.

"Hold on." She reached for her cell phone, clicking the precious picture. "Ok. Now I'm done."

He wiped the cream off his cheeks with his fingers, licking them away.

She sat down at the bed again, happily watching his misery. *Now* that was what she called a great birthday present.

"Alex! Get me a washcloth!" He ordered.

She faked a yawn. "Get it yourself. You only *act* like you're 40. You can still move your limbs!"

"I can't go down! Mom and dad shouldn't know I'm here!" he yelled, the sticky cream irritating his unshaven beard. "I'm not supposed to be using magic!"

"Wait." She stood up, staring at him curiously. "You broke the rules for *me*?"

"This isn't the first time." He pointed out. That it wasn't the last time went unsaid.

She hated herself when she jumped forward to hug him, but the moment he hugged her back, all her anger, all her disappointment was gone. Because for that one minute, she could pretend that he was still living with her, and not so far away that she could only see him on weekends. For that one moment, she could pretend that he was still five and she was still three, when they didn't know about things like moving out and college. For that one hug, she could feel all the love, all the comfort, and all the safety in the world. Because when they were so close, all they could focus on was the feeling of her heart beating against his and his breath on her neck, and the rest of the world was just shut out...

Once they pulled apart, with forced scrunching of noses and 'ewws' that sounded suspiciously like 'awws', she wiped at his face with her handkerchief.

"Alex, don't spoil your-"

She held up a finger to his lips. "I'm *never* gonna admit that I said this. But... thank you, Justin."

He smiled at her, eyes shining with nostalgia. The little girl had grown up so much in his absence. "Eighteen..." He breathed, as she wiped his cheeks clean. "That's cool."

She shrugged. "I've already made a list of the things I'm gonna do. And since you did none of that after you turned eighteen, you're coming with me."

"I can't-" he opened his mouth to protest, but stopped when she stomped on his feet with her heels. She smiled sweetly at him, while he winced and yelped in pain.

"And you couldn't go downstairs and get a washcloth?" He retorted, wondering why in the world she would destroy something that belonged to her for him. And then it hit him. "HEY THAT'S MY CAPTAIN JIM BOB SHERWOOD EXTENDED COLLECTION HANDKERCHIEF! ALEX!"

A/N: Okay that's the longest chapter I've written in MONTHS. Hope you liked it? *fingers crossed* Please review :) Well, later! Got a date with my 16-pages homework now. yay! :)

***Chapter 2*: Ch 1: Near and far**

(flashbacks are in Italics)

Chapter 1: Near and far

She stood in front of his door, scanning the hallway and staircase to make sure no one was near. Once she was sure that the coast was clear, she quietly turned the doorknob and tiptoed into his room.

As soon as she closed the door behind her and turned around, she saw her mother. "Trying to sneak into the room, young lady?" Her mother demanded, hands on her hips, nostrils flaring.

She jumped up in surprise at her voice. She wasn't expecting to see her mother there. This definitely wasn't part of her plan. And now she had to think quickly...

"I just wanted to see Justin." She pouted sweetly, batting her eyelashes.

"Honey, your brother is sick." Her mother reasoned. "You need to let him rest."

She shrugged innocently. "I just wanted to see if his fever is down."

"He's doing better." Her mother assured, putting a hand on her shoulder. "Alex, sweetie, I don't want you to fall sick as well. And I'm sure Justin doesn't want that either. Please. Go back to your room."

She really wanted to throw one of her tantrums, scream and shout till her mother bowed to her demands. But when she saw him sleeping so peacefully, looking more tired than he had ever looked before, her heart melted. She couldn't risk waking him up.

"Can I at least stay at the door? Please mom?"

Her mother sighed, tired of fighting. "Alright. You can stand outside the door."

She smiled at her mother, as she went back to the door, rolling her eyes at the pictures of robots he had stuck to it. She watched him, as he took deep breaths through his nose and his parted mouth. Suddenly, she felt scared, and alone. Usually, she was the sick one, and he was the one sneaking in, watching over her. With the roles reversed, she felt so vulnerable. "Is he gonna be okay?" she asked uncertainly.

Her mother looked at her in confusion, surprised to see her actually show her concern for her brother. "Of course he is, sweetie."

She nodded, leaning against his door-frame, stroking the hard wood tenderly with one hand, as if it were him, while her other hand was placed over her chest, soothing her pounding heart. His room had never seemed so large and so small at the same time. She could see him on the other end of the room; she could even hear his breathing. Just a few steps, and she would be able to reach him, touch him. But her mother was sitting on his bed, an impenetrable barrier, forcing her to stay away. He was just a few feet apart, yet he was unreachable.

So near, yet so far...

December 2010

Alex sighed. Justin's cell phone was switched off- again. At first she thought she'd scream and yell and curse at his voicemail, but then, she decided to hang up without a word. That would freak him out even more! Although she wasn't so sure if she really wanted to scare him, specially after what he did for her the last day. Then again, he still owed her a birthday gift, so fair enough.

Alex sighed again. Why was living without Justin so damn hard? Why did she even care? She thought she'd be really happy once he was out of her way and the house was solely under her control. Instead, she was actually spending most of her days locked up in her room or his, pinning over her loss. Was it really her loss? Did she really lose him? Or would everything be the same again when they got of college and got a job and got married to some random people they loved and had kids?

Damn. Why did everything that she always knew seem so new and confusing and complicated in his absence? What was wrong with her?

"So I was thinking about seeing Justin today." She casually informed her parents during breakfast. She was an adult now; she

didn't need their permission anymore. Not that she had cared about their permission before.

"No magic." Her father protested immediately. "His room-mate may see you pop in!"

"Not if I call him and make sure he's alone in his room." She pointed out. "Come on. It's the weekend. His room-mate is probably out somewhere. I'm sure he has a life. Not everyone is Justin!"

"Honey, we already discussed this. It is not physically safe for your brother to be near you before his exams. And it's not mentally safe for him to talk to you. You terrified him before his finals!-"

"-Hey! How am I supposed to know he didn't wanna hear a list of all the things that could go wrong?" she protested.

Her mother sighed. "He has his exams next week... I know you miss him a lot. But you need to understand. You can't go."

She scoffed, dismissing her mother with a wave of her hand. "What! Pssh. No! I don't miss Justin!" Once her mock laughter stopped, a weary sigh heaved through her chest. No matter what she claimed, she really did miss Justin. And now she'd have to wait to talk to him till his stupid exams ended?

Or...

"And why exactly did I have to join you at video chat at 2 in the afternoon?" he asked incredulously, staring at the screen of his laptop and glaring at the cause of his annoyance. He wasn't sure if he was worried that he wouldn't be able to study for his test, or happy that she had texted him, asking him to sit on video chat. Well, he was going to call her in another ten minutes anyway. And then he was having a little trouble keeping his gaze fixed on her face with what she was wearing. If she wasn't his sister, he would say she did it in purpose. If he wasn't her brother, he couldn't have looked away.

She shrugged, lying on the bed lazily, her laptop open in front of her. "I was bored." She pulled the comforters to her chest, making herself comfortable.

He snorted. "And you think I'm your source of entertainment?"

"Of course not." She assured quickly, grinning at him. "I was hoping you'd make me bored enough to fall asleep."

He frowned at the screen, fuming. "Alex! I need to study!"

"Perfect. That'd do it." She assured with a teasing smile.

He pursed his lips, taking in a deep breath to calm himself. "I'm going to study now. You are welcome to keep staring at me like a creep."

"That'll creep you out? Great. I'll do it then. You're welcome." She smiled, enjoying having the upper hand in the conversation. Beating Justin in their word-wars was one of her favorite things in the world.

He ignored her, opening his text book, and pounding over it, reading it loudly, and hoping she would get bored enough to log off.

She didn't, though. She observed the screen thoroughly, trying to see how much his dorm room had changed since she last visited. It was still a wonder how someone like Justin could have a messy room. Was med-school that tough? Was he getting enough sleep? Was he eating properly?

She groaned. Now she was starting to think like their mother! Not good. "Uh, Justin? Did you stick that poster of TOB on your wall?"

"Shh!" he reprimanded, pointing at his book.

For a moment, she thought that she saw her own picture sticking out from a random page of that page. She ignored the thought and focused on Justin. Did he grow thin? Didn't he shave anymore? Was his hair longer than before? Was that a scar on his hand? Damn! Why couldn't she stop thinking about him?

She grabbed her wand, tapping in at the screen. "Where's my birthday gift?"

He groaned in defeat. "I told you, you can have anything you want, once my exams end. Alex, I *really* need to study now!"

She rolled her eyes. What did she care about his career? All she knew was that if he failed, he'd be back home. That's be just

perfect. "Hey Justin..." she trailed evilly, as she titled her web cam, showing him the room that she was in.

"YOU WENT INTO MY ROOM WITHOUT ASKING!" he freaked out immediately.

"It's not your room anymore." she reminded him, regretting it the minute she said it. The last thing she had wanted to do was hurt him. That truth even stung her every day. For her, it was *always* his room- the room he grew up in, the room she partly grew up in. Everything reminded her of him. With him gone, some things had changed though- the room was much emptier than before with all his stuff gone, and sometimes it scared her to think how much it all changed. It didn't feel like him anymore. It didn't smell like him, it didn't look like him. It was just some room, holding memories of him. However, it was too hard to say goodbye to this room, and it had become her favorite haunt.

"Right." He nodded, brushing back the feeling of nostalgia and homesickness, and letting out a small laugh. He went back to his book without a word, and the room became silent again.

She looked around the room once. Everything in the room still screamed his name. She patted the bed, smiling at some of the memories it brought back. Lately, she had been reminiscing so much. Is that what sisters did when their brothers left for college?

With a sigh, she returned her attention to the screen. She kept staring at him in amusement, watching him read with so much concentration, so much dedication. She watched sweat sticking to his forehead and neck, watched the vein in his throat move in rhythm with his reading, watching his chest go up and down in tune with his breathing. It was just like old times- he was sitting right in front of her, studying like a maniac, while she wasted her time in doing nothing. It felt like he was present in the same room as her, like she could just reach over and poke his shoulder with her pencil. Sometimes it was hard to believe he still wasn't with her!

She lifted her hand to the screen, gently touching his image with her fingertips, like she could actually feel him.

So near, yet so far...

"Put your sweaty hand away from the screen!" he scolded, jumping up in shock when he suddenly saw her fingers dangling in front of his screen out of nowhere. He slapped at his screen, like he could actually touch her hand. She slapped back, purely by instinct. However, their hands didn't burn. "The salt can damage the screen. Alex!"

She placed her other palm over the screen as well, just to watch him groan and twitch. "ALEX!"

She smiled in satisfaction. Now that was what she'd call a perfect afternoon with her brother.

He gasped, his eyes suddenly catching sight of a danger sign painted on her wrist. "Hey, is that a tattoo? Oh my gosh it is! Why didn't you tell me you were getting a tattoo? Do mom and dad know? You shouldn't have-"

"-It's temporary! Relax chicken!" she snapped, cutting off his ranting effectively.

He huffed in relief. "Good, 'cause I'm not gonna take you for tattoo removal sessions. I hear those are unnerving. I never really understood why people- YOU'RE DISTRACTING ME!" He panicked, facing away from the screen and from her.

A smile formed on her lips. This was just like old times. Miles and kilometers were such trivial measures of distance. The real distance was that of hearts. And their hearts were still connected, still as close as ever.

So far, yet so near...

A/N: A BIG thank you to everyone for all the reviews :) You guys made me so happy! I decided to update early and started writing. Estoy agotado ahora! *phew!* I hope you liked this chapter! Let me know! Por favor comenten! :)

P.S. I uploaded a trailer for this fiction and ALSO for my next one! The link to my youtube is at my profile. Check them out! Gracias :)

***Chapter 3*: Ch 2: Longing**

Chapter 2: Longing

December 2010, before sunrise

Her cell phone buzzed early in the morning, waking her up in the process, and she groaned, squinting one eye open to see who had dared to text her while she was enjoying her beauty sleep. When she saw his name, her eyes popped open automatically in shock- *he* actually texted? And *her*? And so early in the morning? And *what* did he text?

"Life is so colorful, so vibrant, so beautiful. Another year of life unfolds in 10 days. Send this to 10 people who made your life beautiful this year."

She blinked. She read the text again, and again, and again. Okay so she definitely read it correctly. Did he really think that she made his life beautiful? And did he just *admit* it? On text that can be stored forever and shown to people again and again and again?

Before she could stop it, a smile spread on her lips. Now she'd definitely have to break the rules quicker than she thought she would and see him as soon as possible. Sighing contently, she put her phone aside and went back to sleep. Well, there was no way she was sending that text back to him before the sun even woke up and she was back in full senses to think!

3 hours later...

"You can't ground me! I'm eighteen!" she protested, staring at her mother incredulously, stomping her feet and crossing her arms. Why was she grounding her adult daughter? Was that even allowed? And it wasn't even her fault in the first place! She had just walked downstairs sleepily and accidentally knocked down the lamp in the living room. Big deal!

"As long as you're living under our roof, we can." Theresa countered sternly, picking up the pieces of the lamp that her beloved daughter had just broken. "You're grounded till Justin's tests end."

She glared at her mother. Suddenly, everything seemed crystal clear. "You just had it planned all along, didn't you? You're just using my innocent mistake of breaking the lamp as an excuse!" she yelled.

Theresa shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. Just hand me over your wand, your laptop, your cell phone."

"MOM!"

"Now."

She groaned, growled, howled, shoving her things at her mother, and storming up the stairs, dashing to her room, slamming her door behind her. And now she had to rely on Justin popping in. Great!

Sighing, she sank to her bed, closing her eyes, curling up with her blankets. At that moment, the only thing that she needed-wanted was Justin. He was the only one who could make it feel all better.. Did he ever feel this way? Did he ever feel like the whole world was against him and she was the only one by his side? Did he ever have this insatiable urge to run to her, hold her, and never let go?

"Don't let go!" Little Alex yelled at her brother, as she clung onto him in despair on top of the forty feet high tower that she had accidentally teleported them into.

He rubbed her back, trying to calm her down. "I won't..."

Every image from her memories were just as vivid as reality. She was the seven year old girl again, and he was her nine-year old hero. Her hands clenched into fists, holding the bed-sheet tightly, as her lips trembled in a small whimper. "Please don't let go..."

2 hours later...

When she woke up, with dried tears and mascara stains on her cheek, the pillow was cuddled to her chest, the comforter pulled up

to her shoulders, her hair tie loosened, her shoes kicked off. She sat up abruptly, looking around her. Was someone there in her room? Was *he* there? "Justin?... Justin are you here?... Justin...?"

Nothing was there- no note, no chocolates, no sign of Justin at all. But she *knew* he had been there. He had to be. That feeling she got in her chest was labeled Justin. It was the feeling she grew up reckoning. Yet, why did it suddenly seem so strange, so different, so new? Why did it make her happy to see that he still cared, when she already knew that? Why was her heart pounding so uncontrollably in excitement? What was that pang of longing she felt in her chest? What did she wish she hadn't fallen asleep and had been able to see him, talk to him... feel him with him?

She sighed, leaning her head back. Everything seemed so complicated ever since he was gone. Everything in her heart was in a tangled mess in his absence. Without him, the feelings were overlapping, mixing, changing? Whatever it was, it was driving her crazy in a good and a bad way at the same time. Without him, she wasn't even able to figure anything out anymore. "I miss you so much, Justin..."

At the same time, in a dorm miles away...

Justin smiled, staring at the picture of his sister he had clicked just a few hours back. She looked so innocent whenever she was asleep- it was hard to believe this was the same girl who gave him the blues (literally). He had gone there to yell at her for the prank mail she had sent her last day (honestly? he just wanted to see her. Not that he'd tell her), but when he saw her whimpering and crying in her sleep, he couldn't wake her up. His heart pained the second he saw her like that. His sister was a really strong girl- she was never like that unless things were really bad. Was something wrong? Was she in some kind of trouble? Was everything alright?

He was able to make out some of her words, and realized that she was having dreams of their childhood. When she had whimpered out a "please don't let go", he had smiled- a genuine smile, and stroked her cheeks softly, wiping away the tears. "I won't..."

He had pulled her comforters up, toned down the air conditioning to make sure she wasn't cold, placed the pillow on her chest. He placed a tender kiss on her forehead, and came back to his dorm again. He didn't leave any note, afraid that it may fall into someone else's hands. He was sure that she would figure out anyway. She always did.

"I miss you so much, Alex..." He sighed, putting his phone aside. He had been expecting to get back the text from her, and when he didn't, he had felt a bit disappointed. But when he went home and saw her favorite things missing, he *knew* his mother had grounded her. And from experience, he knew it was for a week at least. Now he had to live a week without her. Great. All his life, he thought this was what he wanted. And now, this seemed like THE worst thing that could ever happen to him. What was going on? What exactly was he feeling towards her? Longing? Affection? Attachment?... Love? No! It couldn't be!... Could it?

And back into memories...

"What did you do?" He demanded, shouting at her at high pitch.

She winced, taking too steps back. "I don't know what you are talking about..."

"Don't try Alex!" He growled, slamming his fist in the air. "I was having so much fun at the summer camp! Why did you make mom and dad bring me back in the middle of it?"

She winced again. Was he really that mad at her? If she lied, would he get even more furious? "I... I missed you..." She confessed hesitantly.

He blinked, staring at her, trying to understand if he could believe her. He could feel he sincerity in her words, see the honesty in her eyes. "I missed you too..." he admitted. "But that doesn't mean you'll bring me back, Alex. You'll have to learn to live without me. I won't always be here."

She looked at him fearfully. "Where will you go?"

He shrugged, smiling and pulling her into a hug, all his anger suddenly gone. "Someday we'll have to move out and leave for college."

She shook her head vigorously, tightening her hold on him. "No. No. NO! I won't let you go away. Never, ever, ever! Don't even think about it, loser!... I love you..."

A/N: okay so this is as much as I have planned yet. Hope you liked it. Reviews motivate me :)

***Chapter 4*: Ch 3: The snow before the storm**

Chapter 3: the snow before the storm

December 2010

She stood against her window frame, her furry sweater tugged close to her chest, her hands cold even with the gloves on, her feet freezing in spite of the boots. Her eyebrows furrowed in annoyance as she watched snow fall everywhere, painting the city white. This time of the year was the coldest. While she loved being lazy and sleeping under warm cozy blankets all day, she hated the fact that she couldn't go out and have fun.

This year, however, there was another cause of her annoyance- Justin. No matter how hard she tried to ignore her worries, she couldn't. She kept wondering if it was this cold at Justin's dorm. Was he cold? Was he freezing? Did he have enough blankets? Did he buy enough jackets and coats? Did he pack his gloves and winter caps?

"Alex! Your phone!" Max yelled from downstairs, breaking through her train of thoughts.

"I can't go down!" Alex yelled back, not moving an inch. "It's too cold downstairs!"

"All right." Max yelled again. "I'll tell Justin you said you can't come down."

"Wait! Did you say Justin? Max? Maxie? Ugh!" Alex groaned, cursing her *stupid, stupid, stupid* younger brother in her mind, dashed down the stairs as fast as she could, and snatched the phone from him. "Justin?" she asked, panting.

"Hey", he whispered back in a throaty tone. "You alright?"

She rolled her eyes. "You're the one with the funny voice." She wanted to ask him if he was sick, but that went against the rule.

He chuckled. "*Funny?*"

"Well I'm still grounded so I'm not getting into more trouble by cursing you while mom is around!" she snarled, gritting her teeth.

"It's snowing. You would have been at home anyway." He reasoned, trying to console her. He still couldn't believe he was missing the New York snow that year.

"Na-uh." She protested. "How do you know I wouldn't have teleported into your dorm if I had my wand with me?" She could hear her mother squeal out an '*I knew it*' in the background, but she ignored it.

"It's colder in here." he informed briefly.

She bit on her lip, looking at her mother expectantly. When her mother did not mouth the '*he's okay*' she was looking for, she sighed. "That's how you caught a cold?"

"And why do you care?" he scoffed, ultimately breaking into a spit of coughs.

She smirked victoriously. "That serves you right."

"Alex." he warned.

"Why don't you just come back home?" she asked casually. As much as every last strand in her body was screaming at him to say yes, she maintained her composure.

"Tests, remember?" he sighed sadly. "But I'm coming back for Christmas of course. And I want you out of my room when I come back. I called you to tell you that personally."

She made a face, sticking out her tongue. Realizing he couldn't actually see her, she quickly scoffed. "I'm not getting out of your room... sick-o."

He faked a cough. "Please?"

She grinned. "I know that one was fake. You've learnt nothing from me Justin!"

Her mother cleared her throat, motioning for her to hand the phone over to her.

She really wanted to talk about the time when he had sneaked into her room and she was sleeping, but with everyone else in the room, she decided against it. "Mom wants to talk to you now. Bye." She reluctantly handed the phone over to her mom, and quietly went back to her room.

For the first time, he was sick while he was away. She had no idea that it could make her feel this helpless. The dork just *had to* catch a cold and add to her worries, didn't he? How could he ever live without it! He just *had to* get her all worried and feeling all those weird things again!

He sipped on the hot coffee his room-mate had made him, cuddling in his blanket and reading the paper for the test he had the next day.

His nose was running, his head was aching; all he wanted to do was sleep and never get up. Instead, he stayed up, studying. If he could finish off studying quickly, he could start packing his bags. He still had a vast part of his Christmas shopping left. He still hadn't got anything for his father and his little brother, and while he had bought his gift for Alex, he still wasn't even sure what he wanted from her. He would have to decide, then buy it with his own money, and hand it over to her, so that she could gift it to him. He was actually thinking about skipping it this year- a college student didn't have an unlimited supply of money, even with magic. And then of course the gift-wrapping was still left, and he still had to think of slogans to write on the wrappers. The more he thought about these, the more stressed he felt. So he had decided to stop thinking about it. He had no idea how not-thinking worked though. That was her department, not his.

The worst part of it all was that he got sick and no one was there to care. True he was growing up and had to learn to live on his own, but being sick always made him feel like a little child. He really wanted his mother to run her hands across his temples, check his temperature, give him medicines, fuss over him and take care of him. He knew it very well that it wasn't going to happen, but that didn't stop his heart from pinning.

As snow cut off the warmth and brightness of the sun's light, the cold weather, the thick layer of snow, and the lack of sunshine was unusually making him feel homesick, making him long to go home. He wanted to see everyone again, especially Alex. Maybe if he met her in person, he would be able to figure out what exactly he was feeling lately? Or maybe it would all go away?

He couldn't wait to see what would happen. He couldn't wait for the test to get over and the winter break to begin!

A winter in the memory-land...

"Let's build a snow-man." Little Justin suggested enthusiastically as he tugged on the sleeves of his sister's coat.

Little Alex scoffed. "A snow-man? In the streets on New York? Really?"

He frowned at her disapprovingly. As she grew up, she was becoming more and more dry and sarcastic. "Why are you becoming like this?"

"Like what? Cool?"

"No...Dr-Discouraging. Now come on." He whined, tugging on her sleeve and pulling her outside, where Max was already waiting. She reluctantly followed his lead, standing at a corner away from her two brothers. All she wanted to do was curl up in her blankets and watch TV. "Why do we have to build a snow-man?" she complained, rolling her eyes.

He stared at her in disbelief. "Because it'll scare the aliens away! Don't you know this?"

"Aliens aren't real. Don't you know this?" she mimicked.

He sighed, gathering the snow in his little hands. "This is not what I pictured having a sister would be like."

"Oh, did you picture it would be something like this?" she asked innocently, as she rolled up a ball of ice in her hands, and BHAMM. His coat was sprayed white. Perfect aim.

He shivered in cold and shock, jumping up and clumsily falling down on the snow.

She laughed out loud, clapping her hand, admiring the sight in front of her. She turned around to gather more snow and BHAMM. Her back was suddenly freezing. Did he just dare to start a snow-ball fight with her?

"Justin!" she threatened, looking at him darkly, the ball ready in her hands.

"Uh-oh." He quickly jumped to his feet in fear, running away. She followed, catching up with no effort, and tacking him into the ground.

BHAMM.

They looked at their splashed clothes and then at each other in confusion, before finally settling their gaze on their younger brother, the culprit. Before they knew it, they were both rolling on the snow in laughter, ignoring the people staring.

"Justin! Alex!" Their mother's terrified voice came from the front door. "You will catch a cold!"

Their father's voice came from inside. "Alex, what did you do?"

December 2010

That was the strangest week in both their lives. Snow, snow, snow. Justin, Justin, Justin. Alex, Alex, Alex.

She spent the week in wait and anticipation of his arrival, curling up with the blankets or pounding over old photo albums of their family. Could anyone ever have guessed that *she* would be revisiting times gone by? Yet, here she was, painting pictures in her mind about days forgotten. Some memories were still vivid in her mind, some had faded away, some vague, some weird, some happy, some sad, some simply ordinary, but every single photo brought tears to her eyes when no one was noticing. The brightest patches of color were of course on the pictures of him and her. Even when she was rolling her eyes, making a face, and he was frowning, crumbling, fuming, glaring, trembling, those were some of the liveliest pictures ever taken. It seemed like her colorful world was trapped in these papers of all hues, while it slept under snow's fair white blanket. She couldn't wait for it to wake up again.

It was the weirdest test he had ever given. He was sick, homesick, and stressed. But he studied hard and gave the tests well. He called up his mother every day. *Yes mom, I did well. Yes I'm fine. No I did not forget the medicines. Please tell Alex to wear scarves.* It was the same routine every day. And sometimes when his head was pounding and the world was spinning, he was missing Alex again.

He wouldn't have to miss her much longer though. The week was over. And now it was time for him to get back home again.

A/N: thanks to everyone for all the reviews. It's really great to see new readers/reviewers, and of course I love my old reviewers/friends :) Hope you liked this chapter, cause I'm pretty much exhausted now with the effort I put in on this :P are you excited for Justin to come back home?

***Chapter 5*: Ch 4: Obstacles**

Disclaimer: I don't own the song lyrics used. Namely: "I'd come for you" by Nickelback, "I get love" by Emily Robins, "Year without rain" by Selena Gomez, and "I'm going home" by Daughtry. My lyrics may not be 100% correct

Chapter 4: obstacles

She sat in the living room, trying to look as gloomy as possible and hide her excitement, but failing miserably. Just a few hours more, and he'd be back home with her. While waiting did make her hopelessly impatient, she couldn't help but smile at the thought of seeing him after such a long time. Well, she was un-grounded just a few minutes back so she could just say she was happy for that.

"Yes, honey, are you in your flight?" Her ears perked up as she heard her mother's voice, talking to her brother on the phone. "Oh, really?... That's so sad.... Okay... Okay... alright.... we love you too. Go grab some food now sweetie...bye!"

"What happened?" she asked as soon as her mother got off the phone.

"Justin's flight has been cancelled because of the weather." Her mother announced sadly. "He'd have to take the next flight."

"When's the next flight?" she asked, trying act as non-chalant as possible, even though she was freaking out on the inside. *Please say ten minutes. Please say ten minutes.*

Her mother sighed. "Seven hours later."

Her eyes turned as wide as humanly possible. He wouldn't be home for seven more hours? *Seven freaking hours?* "Are you kidding me? Give me the phone!" she snarled at her mother, snatching the phone from her grasp and dialing his number before anyone could protest.

"Yes mom?" his weary voice came from the other end.

Her heart throbbed at the sound of his voice. He sounded as disappointed as she was feeling. And tired too. Probably sick as well. It made her miss him even more. And that only made her angrier. "Who do you think you are? What the hell are you doing?"

"Oh hi Alex. Nice to hear from you too." he retorted sarcastically.

She quickly smacked Max, getting her anger out before she starting shouting at him over the phone. "Get here right now, Justin." She demanded calmly.

"Alex! My flight's cancelled. How will I do that?" he asked incredulously.

She shook her head at the guy's poor common sense. "Umm, I don't know. By waving a wand and saying a spell? Oh for God's sakes, you're a wizard Justin! Just get here!"

"I am not using magic." He announced firmly, in a voice that said 'I won't budge an inch'.

She stammered. While she was expecting him to protect, she didn't expect such an unyielding reply. "Well.. I.. You... Fine! Just go to Hell!" she yelled, shoving the phone at her mother and storming out of the stairs.

"Your sister was just upset." His mother comforted immediately. "I'm sure she didn't mean anything."

"I know that mom." He sighed, immediately making up his mind. "I got to go."

"I'd come for you, no one but you. Yes, I'd come for you, but only if you told me to...And I'd fight for you, I'd lie, it's true, give my life for you, you know I'll always come for you..."

"Thank you so much for the lift." Justin said, speaking as loudly as possibly so that his voice could be heard over the loud radio. "I really appreciate it." After talking to Alex, he just knew that he couldn't wait for the next flight, especially when it was so uncertain. He had to get back home by some other means. So he decided to hit the road and take good old lifts- even hire a cab, if required.

"No problem, kid." The man on the driver's seat replied, chewing on his cigar. "Where are you going?"

"Home." He replied, smiling. "My flight was cancelled. I thought I'd wait but then Alex got mad and started yelling. I knew I had to get home back. You don't want to mess with that girl... You'll turn left now, right? I'll get off here then."

"... So if you're ever lost and find yourself all alone. I'd search forever just to bring you home, here and now. It's a vow..."

The man laughed out loud at his words, pulling over to the right.

"Thank you so much. Again." Justin smiled, getting off the car with his bags. "Ummm... how much do I owe you? You said you wanted ten dollars, right?"

"Save it, lad." The man waved, starting the engine again. "Just go get your girl now."

Justin stood dumbly, mouth hanging open as he saw the car drive away. Some Christmas song was playing on the background in some shop, but in his mind, the alarm bells were ringing. Did the way he talk about Alex made it seem like she was his girlfriend? And did he just not protest when a man thought his sister was his girlfriend?

Wasn't this the most complicated winter ever?

"Thought you'd always be there, thought you'd always want me, thought you'd always be around to hold me. Now that's over-rated! Now your picture's faded..."

Alex sighed. She was sitting here, in Justin's old room, sniffing and crying as she listened to a sad song on her ipod and remembered the good old times they had spent together. This wasn't how the evening was supposed to go! He was supposed to be home, he was supposed to be in his room, he was supposed to be screaming as she held a rat near his face. She was supposed to be laughing and enjoying. They were supposed to be together. They were supposed to be happy. Yet, he ended up trapped in an airport all alone, and she ended up curled in his room.

"Why does he have to be so stubborn?" she mumbled angrily to herself. "One spell wouldn't hurt anyone! Damn, I can't even find weather spell. Ugh!"

Her mind was cluttered with rational fear. What if the weather didn't improve? What if he couldn't board the next flight and was stuck longer?

Anything and everything in her life seemed hopeless to her at that moment. Yet, she kept hoping and wishing that he'd be home soon some way, somehow...

"Damn." Justin cursed, looking at his clock as another car ignored him and passed by. Why were people so heartless? Couldn't they be kind enough to offer him a ride? He had to get home fast, and not just because of the angry brat, but because of the snow too. He'd become an ice statue if he stayed there much longer.

As another car ignored him, yet offered a ride to the next guy, Justin groaned. Why wouldn't anyone give him a lift? What was wrong with him? He looked down at himself, finally realizing what was the matter. He hadn't shaved for so long, he probably looked like a thief. His eyes were red because of his cold, but he probably looked drunk. And his coat probably made it look like he was carrying a gun.

Justin sighed. This was so unhealthy and so stupid. This was the worst idea. Yet, this was the only thing he could do- Justin took off his coat, standing freezing in the snow.

"I'm missing you so much! Can't help it I'm in love! A day without you is like a year without rain...I need you by my side, don't know how I'll survive, a day without you is like a year without rain..."

Alex couldn't believe *she* was listening to a romantic song like this. And she couldn't believe the feelings it was stirring in her mind. Why did the song make Justin's face flash in her mind? Sure, she was missing him, but was it because she loved him?... In a family way, right?... Right? "Ugh! Stupid weather! You started these whole feelings thingy again! Damn you!"

Justin rubbed his hands together, riding shotgun at the car that had finally stopped. He was so grateful to the old lady who was driving, he didn't even have words to express himself. He just burst into tears like a little child and hugged her.

"I'm going home, to the place where I belong, where your love has always been enough for me..."

His eyes widened as he listened to the radio and the image of Alex flashed in his eyes. Suddenly, a curtain was drawn open and he could clearly see the scene. He clearly understood that home for him always meant Alex. Did it mean that he actually loved her?

"You could have caught a cold out there." The old lady scolded Justin, interrupting his thoughts and bringing him back to reality, back to the traffic snail-race. "Why did you take off your coat? What were you thinking?"

"I was just thinking about my home." Justin shrugged, smiling as he looked at his watch. Just five more minutes.

A/N: first off, a very MERRY CHRISTMAS to you all! God bless you all :) secondly, THANK YOU so much for all the amazing reviews! I'm over-whelmed! And lastly, I hope you liked this chapter. I updated as fast as possible. :)

***Chapter 6*: Ch 5: Together at last**

Disclaimer: song used is "just so you know" by Jesse McCartney.

Chapter 5: Together at last

Somewhere in the middle of crying, complaining and listening to sad songs, she had fallen asleep, wrapped in her blankets in his bed. She was woken up when the doorbell suddenly rang. She groaned, covering her ears with pillows.

Out of nowhere, her heart began pounding in her chest, her eyes snapped open. What was this feeling she was getting? Could it be him? Did he come back?

"Justin!" she heard her mother exclaim downstairs. That was all that she needed to hear. She jumped out of her bed, dashing towards the door. As her hand touched the cold round doorbell, she paused. She took in deep breaths, trying to calm herself, trying to force the excitement to dissipate away. Why should she even get so excited? He came back to his house. He didn't come back for her! Did he?

The doorknob turned and she jumped back in surprise. The door opened slowly. One, two, three. And she got the biggest shock of her life. There was Justin, with his hair longer than it ever was, more messier than a bird's nest, his beard unshaven for days, his eyes red, his nose almost like a reindeer's- red and swollen with cold. He was covered with coats from head to toe, and it was dripping with melted snow.

The pounding in her heart returned. If there was one thing this distance had done, it had transformed him from Justin-her brother to Justin-just a guy. She could clearly see that with the way she stared at him- she was seeing him in a new light, almost in a new role.

He looked at her with tired eyes and a faint smile on his lips. She was wearing a nice t-shirt and jeans, just like he had expected. Her hair was done up, but it has gotten messed, and so had her make-up. Even then, she was just as beautiful as he remembered. Had it really been a long time? Wasn't it just 10 days?

"How did you get here?" she asked curiously, stepping back to let him in. "You used magic?"

He shook his head. "Road", he croaked out, sniffing.

"Why?" she asked again.

He smiled at her. "Well, I didn't want to get my sister upset."

The pounding in her heart increased. Those were the words she wanted to hear, and he said it! She smiled back at him. "*Please!* I wasn't upset!" she rolled her eyes, moving forward towards him with open, inviting arms.

"Don't hug me! Don't hug me!" he panicked, taking quick steps backwards.

The pounding changed to a feeling of something hammering hard. She dropped her arms, swallowing the hurt, and looked up at him with questioning eyes. Did he not want to hug her anymore? Did his college friends convince him that brothers and sisters don't hug as much as they did?

"No, I want to hug you too, just not right now. I didn't wash my hands or change my clothes yet." He explained in a strained voice. "Who knows what germs were in those cars and roads? Plus, I need to put on my mask; you can catch a cold from me."

"Oh my gosh!" she whined, running forward and shutting him up with a hug.

"Alex!" he whined too, but hugged her back. His senses were in complete overdrive. He could feel her against him, smell the familiar yet unfamiliar scent of her shampoo, sense her hair tickling his nose, heart her heart beating just as rapidly as his, for known and unknown reasons, feel her cold breath hit his hot neck and. Everything else just blurred out, as he was overwhelmed by her, and the feelings it brought. Compared to what he was feeling at that moment, every feeling that had been tormenting him back in his dorm were dull. "I missed you." He whispered softly.

She pulled back, looked into his eyes, and nodded. "Man, what's with his cave-man look, huh?" she teased, stroking his rough cheek with her palms. She gasped at the touch. "Justin.... You're burning up!"

He pulled back, cringing. "That's nothing. Just a minor fever."

"Minor?" she asked incredulously. "I'm telling mom."

"No, don't!" he clutched her hand, holding her back. He was surprised to see her stop without resisting. "Mom's going to make me grandma's tree bark and fish oil. Ugh." He made a face of disgust and shuddered for emphasis.

She shook her head at him in amusement, and pulled her hand back. "Well, I'm still telling her. I don't know what to do in a fever!"

"Of course you do!" he protested. "You learnt that in class."

She arched an eyebrow at him.

He sighed in defeat, sitting down on his bed. "Never mind."

"I can't believe I'm sick during Christmas time." He complained, as his mother put the soaked cloth on his head.

"You'll be fine, hijo." His mother assured. "Just rest now, okay? Come on, Alex."

Alex sat down on the bed stubbornly. "I'm not going." This was exactly what happened when they were kids. She was an adult now. Finally she could do what she wanted to do, which was to stay there with him.

Justin kept silent, too tired and too sick to join in the quarrel.

"Alex! I can't have two sick kids at my home at the same time!" her mother reasoned.

"We are not kids anymore!" she snarled. "And I'm not leaving Justin!" she announced, crawling under the blankets with him. "I'm staying here."

Her mother sighed, submitting to her daughter's whim, and went outside the room, closing the door behind her.

Justin groaned. It seemed like someone was playing drums with his head. It was hurting so bad!

She didn't understand why he grunted. Was something wrong? Did he want her to leave too? She tilted her head to look at him. "Hmm?"

"My head hurts." He groaned again, whining.

She blinked, not comprehending what he was saying.

"Headache."

"Oh, okay." She shrugged, sitting up and rubbing his temples. She never imagined she'd be taking care of him, but she really wanted to. She wanted him to feel better, she wanted his pain to go away. It pained her to see him in pain.

He opened his eyes in shock when he felt her touch. "Alex?"

"Relax. I just..." she bit her lip, looking away, "I don't want you sleeping all day... I want to pull the pranks I had planned. Yep."

He smiled, closing his eyes, relaxing and going back to sleep, his pain fading with her soft touch, his heart warming up with a sense of comfort and security. He was home, he was with her, and he was going to be okay.

Two days later...

"After two boring days, the dork is out of the bed." She retorted, as they all sat together at the breakfast table. She was really happy that he was finally alright, but there was no way she was going to admit that. Admitting that would be like... like admitting that she was in love with him, which she wasn't!

"Uneventful would have been a better word." He mumbled.

"Oh I get it." She looked at him, smiling sweetly. "You're my personal thesaurus."

He faked a laugh, scoffing. "Do you even know what a thesaurus is?"

"Thesaurus! That reminds me!" Max suddenly jumped up from his seat. "I forgot to put on some music! It's Christmas time!"

Justin, Alex and Harper rolled their eyes, Jerry smiled, and Theresa sighed. "Maxie! Finish your vegetables!"

"I'm just surprised at how fast Justin recovered." Jerry mumbled through a mouthful. "You didn't use any magic, did you, Alex?"

Alex scoffed, laughed, snorted. "...No."

"Alex..."

"What? You want me to reverse the spell and send him back to bed?" she asked her father, skipping the part about how she fell sick too and cured herself. Sick Justin was bad, but being sick herself was even worse.

He sighed his defeat, returning his full attention to the food.

"I shouldn't love you but I want to, I just can't turn away, I shouldn't see you but I can't move, I can't look away..."

"Max! I thought you'd put on Christmas Carols!" Harper protested.

Max shrugged. "Alex stole the CDs."

"Alex!"

"Hey I sent them to Justin! I thought he would feel homesick!"

"What! I didn't get anything from you!" Justin held his hands up. "I'm not getting involved in your schemes."

"And I don't know how to be fine when I'm not, 'Cause I don't know how to make a feeling stop..."

"Enough, kids!" Theresa scolded. "You can listen to this now. I am going to sing the carols **myself** in the evening."

Everyone whined in unison. Their worst nightmare was about to come true.

"And you are going to sing with me." She added. "Like a normal family."

Scratch that. This was their worst nightmare. So the whining increased in volume.

"You know, on second thoughts, I think I kept the CDs in Justin's room." Alex admitted.

Harper patted her hand. "I had a feeling."

"I knew it." Justin mumbled.

Alex glared at him threateningly, gesturing at the fork in her hand and the wand in her boot- a deadly combination with her evil ideas, forcing him to shut up.

"Just so you know This feeling's taking control of me And I can't help it I won't sit around, I can't let him win now Thought you should know I've tried my best to let go of you But I don't want to I just gotta say it all Before I go Just so you know..."

As he listened to the song, his eyes involuntarily flickered to her face, and not just because she was kicking his foot under the table and stealing food from his plate. The lyrics were making him think of her, he could relate what he was feeling with the song.

So he was falling in love with her!

Instead of the guilt, hatred and regret that he was expecting, all he felt was a new kind of excitement, a new kind of happiness. Being in love made him feel like the happiest man on earth. He realized that the feeling must have been there for longer than he had realized, because by that time, he had accepted the feelings, he was ready to risk it all and act on them.

And now he knew what he wanted to do, what he was going to do. But he had no idea how or when.

A/N: hey guys! Hope everyone had a great Christmas! :) I hope this chapter didn't disappoint, I hope you liked the

reunion. Let me know. And what do you think Justin is going to do?

***Chapter 7*: Ch 6: Gifts and lists**

Chapter 6: Gifts and lists

The evening passed with carols being sung, cake being baked, cookies being stolen from the jars, and of course, Justin and Alex acting like they couldn't see the rest of the world. "Again, the correct pronunciation is en-cy-clo-pae-dia." "No, the correct pronunciation is nobody-cares-about-that-Justin."

Harper took full responsibility of decorating the Christmas tree, so everyone (except Alex) dived in immediately and started helping her out, making sure that no food item was hung from it. The lights went off in the middle of it when Max has a little accident with the wires and his duct tape, and Justin had to work hard and fix it all up. It was a blessing that Alex never moved more than an inch, and so a magical mayhem did not happen. Well, until Harper and Justin accidentally got stuck under the mistletoe while decorating the kitchen, leading to super awkwardness, and Alex *had to* get up and get them out before anything could happen. The only thing she destroyed was the poor mistletoe, and the cup-cakes in the process. But the good thing was, she realized she wanted Justin all to herself. Yep, she wanted to be with Justin. She had no doubts about it anymore.

"I wasn't going to kiss Justin!" Harper kept repeating. "I love Zeke now." Alex simply rolled her eyes and went back to being lazy, supervising the whole thing and ordering everyone around.

By the end of the evening, the whole family, once again except Alex, was exhausted. Once they had placed the presents under the Christmas tree, and made sure Alex and Max weren't going to rip them open already, they all decided to head to bed early.

"What are you doing in my room?" Justin asked in alarm, when he saw her sitting on his bed, chewing on his pen. Ew.

"You'd be interested to know that I've finally made a list of-

She was interrupted by Justin's gasp. "-You made a list?"

She shot him a glare and continued. "-Of all the things I want for my birthday. Here, take a look."

She passed him the list, and he took it in his hands fearfully. Once he started reading it, his eyes grew wide, growing wider and wider as he moved forward. "You want to go skydiving?" he asked in shock.

She shrugged. "We'll have fun. Come on!"

"WE?" he asked incredulously, jumping up in shock. "Oh, no, no, no. There is *no way* I'm doing these crazy things with you! And there's *no way* you are doing these either!"

"But you said I can have anything for my birthday!" she protested, pouting at him and batting her eyelashes.

He held his hands up in the air. "I meant gifts!"

"I had enough gifts!" she yelled. "I just wanted to spend some time with you, you know... now that you're away, I..." she coughed in her hands "miss you."

His eyes softened at that, and a smile spread on his lips, before his face turned serious again. "No, what am I thinking! Stop manipulating me Alex!"

"I wasn't manipulating! I was speaking the truth!"

That stunned him speechless. So she really did want to spend some time with him? Honestly, he wanted to spend time with her too. He wanted to be close to her all the time, to see her laugh, to see her talk, to be with her. It would also help him to get closer to her. Maybe she'd feel the way about him too? Maybe he would be able to make a move?

"Fine." He sighed. "We'll edit the list."

She bit her lip, thinking. Agreeing to that maybe a good idea, after all, once he started having fun, she could just convince him for more. "Okay."

He snatched the pen from her, wiping it clean with a tissue. "Do you know how many germs are present in your saliva?"

"Wow, med-school's made you even more dorky." She retorted, snatching the pen and deliberately licking it this time.

"Alex!" he snatched it back again, wiping it on her shirt, getting a tightly slap for that, and began modifying the list. "Sky-diving is off.... You're going pony-riding alone... Surfing can work.... No hunting! It's so cruel to kill animals!... Party? Okay.... Drinking. No.... Trip to Dragon-land? Okay.... Shopping? I don't have money, but alright.... Painting Tribeca Prep red. NO... shrinking Max and chasing him around? Alex!"

He turned around to glare at her and scold her, only to find that she had already fallen asleep. In his bed. In his room. "And who did the work today?" Justin mumbled to himself, frowning and getting up. He wrapped her up in his blankets, turned off the lights, and was about to leave the room, when he heard her sleepy voice. "Where the hell are you going?"

He jumped up in surprise at her voice. "You're awake?"

"Now." She countered immediately.

"Good. Then, get out of my bed." He snarled, tugging on the covers.

She groaned, clutching the covers tightly and not letting go. "But I want to sleep here. I have been sleeping here all these months!"

That piece of information was new to him. Why was she sleeping in his room? He tilted his head to the side, staring at her. "And where am I going to sleep?"

She shrugged non-chalantly. "This room has an amazing floor. I fell down in my sleep one night, so trust me, it's comforting... there's the couch in the living room... Table 9 in the sub-shop, you already know.... Or you can just sleep here." she mumbled quietly, shifting to a side and making room for him.

His heart sped up at those words, with the images it brought to his mind. Why was she inviting him? Did she feel the same way too? Would she be creeped out if he actually did crawl in? Well, she was the one who offered, plus it was his bed, so why not?

She held her breath, waiting for his answer. As she anticipated his response, she began regretting what she said. She hadn't even planned on saying that, it just slipped out of her lips. And now she was worried that she had pushed too far. Maybe he'd be freaked out of her and run away.

Just when she was about to open her mouth to apologize, she heard him sigh. "Fine." He breathed, taking off his shoes and socks and crawling in with her.

Her heart-beat exceeded all limits as her excitement reached its apex. She kept her eyes forcefully shut, as she felt the bed beside her sink with his weight, and heard the light being flicked off. She couldn't believe what she had just done, and she couldn't believe that he actually agreed. So maybe he was feeling these weird things too? Maybe it was okay?

The thought gave her boundless hope, and courage to take another step. She rolled over to his side, hugging him tightly.

"What are you doing?" he asked immediately, but his voice was husky, instead of the squeaky tone that she was expecting. It made her breath hitch.

She quickly collected herself, and kicked his foot. "Stop being a whining baby! I'm cold!"

He didn't complain any more, just mumbled a good night and tried to concentrate on falling asleep. He, however, couldn't help but notice how fast his heart was beating, and how faster hers was. He couldn't ignore the thrill and tingles it gave him, he couldn't overlook the warmth spreading from her body to his. Weird as it was, the feeling was comforting. It felt natural.

So maybe they were both feeling the same way?

Well, they had one thing in common at least- they both slept peacefully than night, more soundly than they did in months.

Morning came, and thanks to his alarm, they woke up before anyone else and didn't have to face any awkward questions. They quickly got dressed, and she quickly began yelling and pounding on everyone's doors, waking them up. Soon the family was up and downstairs.

The presents were opened and exchanged. As usual, Alex shared credits for Justin's gifts.

"This is for you", Justin announced, passing her a tiny box. She opened it eagerly, finding the new cell phone that she wanted.

Her eyes bulged out. He could afford *that*! "Did you rob a bank or something?" she teased, as she thanked him with a hug.

He rolled his eyes. "Ever heard of the word savings?"

"Yep. That's what I do to my energy. Pfft..." she laughed, pulling back after lingering for a few extra seconds.

"So what did you get for Justin?" his father asked curiously.

She looked up at Justin expectantly. He bit his lip. "Actually, I couldn't decide what I wanted. So we decided that I'll take the present later."

Alex looked at him in surprise. What was he up to?

Justin gulped. He knew exactly what he wanted.

A/N: again, THANK YOU for the amazing reviews! You guys are awesome! I love you guys! Hope you liked this chapter. Let me know :)

***Chapter 8*: Ch 7: One step at a time**

Disclaimer: I do not own the lyrics used, namely "Can I have this dance" from HSM3, "Rhythm Divine" by Enrique, "Anywhere for you" by Backstreet boys, and "The touch" by Ricky Martin. Lyrics are in Italics.

Chapter 7: One step at a time

Christmas evening passed with the family, and apart from the teasing, bickering, secret smiles, slaps, unnecessary touches, pointless wrist holding and hugs, nothing else could happen- neither of them could take a step. All they could do was realize how happy they were when they were with each other, and fall in love even more.

Christmas night, and once again he found her in his bed. Awake. In her night clothes. With her cell phone in her lap. With her wand on his bedside table.

"Are you going to keep sleeping in here every night?" he asked, amused, as he sat down at the edge of the bed, facing her.

She shrugged, texting away non-chalantly. "You know I always wanted your room. This room's better."

He sighed. He didn't even want to fight, he wanted her in his room, creepy and twisted as it was. "So.... What are you doing?" he asked curiously, as he watched her text away at full speed.

She rolled her eyes. "Texting, duh!"

He rolled his eyes too. "Yeah I can see that. What I wanted to know is who you're texting so late at night."

Her hands ceased its work at that, and her heart skipped a beat. Was he being possessive and over-protective? Usually, this attitude of his annoyed her like crazy, but at that moment, it just made her smile to see that he cared about her.

She shrugged again, putting her cell phone away and taking possession of his blankets before he could claim them. "Oh, just some guy who had asked me out on a date tomorrow."

His heart sunk at that, his jaw tensed. He wasn't planning on having another guy in the whole equation! It just sent everything off balance. It dealt a blow to his confidence, and made him think that maybe he was too late. Maybe someone was already in her life.

She kept quiet, studying his reaction to that. He seemed tense, worried, sad? He seemed to be in thoughts. Perfect. That was just the effect that she had wanted to see. She smiled, laying her head on his lap and looking up at him. "But I told him he'd have to put his plans aside, because..."

He heaved a sigh of relief at that, bit his lip in worry when he realized that she noticed, and forced a smirk on his face. "Because?"

She grinned. "Because... I want to spend tomorrow with my dear brother."

He frowned playfully. "I'm sorry, but I don't think Max will be interested."

She nudged his thigh hard with her elbow. "Max is not my only brother, you know."

He yelped in pain, rubbing his thigh. "Well, he is your only *dear* brother." He pointed out.

Her grin grew wider at that. She nudged him again. "Come on now, cheer up. I don't always want to mess with you. Is it too hard to believe that I actually want to spend some time with you?"

He yelped in pain again, whining. "It is, when you keep doing things like this."

"Sorrreek." She offered half-heartedly, getting up, taking the pillow and settling down in what she decided would be her side. He followed, still frowning, and flicked off the lights.

His frown turned into a full scowl two minutes later, when he realized that she didn't hug him like she had done the last day. Without her arms wrapped around him, he felt alone. He felt incomplete. He felt... weird.

She became still in her side, anticipating. She had pushed the ball to Justin's court. She wanted to see what he would do. Would

he hug her? Would he cuddle her? Or would he just keep sleeping like that?

Just when she had given up hope, her patience paid off. She finally felt his hand slide around her waist. She sighed contently, placing her hand over his. With just a simple gesture, with no words spoken, they both knew what their chances were.

"I really missed you..." he whispered softly. "I really want to spend some time with you too."

She smiled, aware that he couldn't see it in the dark. "Sky-diving?"

"Alex." he warned.

"Fine. Let's just go to a club then." She grumbled. "At least one of us can dance"

He huffed into her neck, making her shiver involuntarily. "I can dance."

She huffed back. "Yeah, right."

"I can!"

"You can't."

"Can!"

"Can't!"

"Can!"

.... The argument went on, for who knows how long, but in the end, the words faded, as they were both enveloped by sleep and the warmth of each others' arms. They both knew this was going to become a habit.

"It's the middle of the night, and I'm reaching out for you. In the darkness I can feel your touch break through. When I look into your eyes, and your skins' against my skin, I'll hold you till the sun comes crashing in..."

"Morning." He greeted, turning off his alarm.

She replied with a groan and a smack on his arm.

He smiled, ruffling her hair. "Oh look at that, Sleeping Beauty is grumpy."

"Justin!" she roared, slapping him hard with both hands as she got up and quickly rushed to the dresser to get her hair combed.

He smiled in satisfaction. "Get ready."

The "Justin and I are going out together for some brother-sister time" met with the expected "aww"s and tears and smiles and flashes of cameras. But whatever, it got her some cash that she could 'spend any way she wanted'.

And so they ended up in her favorite club, with her favorite dance floor, and her favorite DJ, all set to dance and grind. The only problem with that was only soft tunes was being played, and she wasn't a fan of that.

"Ugh I hate these songs." She complained, slouching at the bar and taking a shot.

"It's not that bad." He protested. Surprisingly, he loved the club. It wasn't one of the underground clubs that he hated. This one was on the fifth floor, with glass panes for walls through which he could clearly see the city outside, see the snow covering it, and feel the pleasurable chilly feeling of winter. He liked the ambiance at the club too, the soft lights, the soft color of the walls. Overall, it was perfect for the holiday season, and it was perfectly romantic. It was just what he wanted.

She shot him a look that said 'are you completely nuts', obviously displeased by the lack of "ugghhh"-style hard rock that she was expecting, and took another shot.

"Oh, no, no, no, you're not getting drunk. I promised mom and dad I'll take care of you." He reprimanded, forcefully pulling her down from the stool and dragging her to the dance floor. "Now come on", he smiled, offering her his hand.

She made a face at him, looked at the bar with longing in her eyes, but took his hand anyway.

"Even a thousand of miles, can't keep us apart. Cause my heart is, wherever you are. It's like catching lightening, the chances of finding someone like you..."

She looked up at him wide-eyed. "Where did you learn to dance?"

He gave her a smug grin. "College isn't as useless as you think. Maybe you should try to get into one."

She stomped on his foot on purpose. "Are you really going to give me the college lecture *now*?"

He shook his head. "Actually, no. I'm going to save it for dinner tomorrow night. You know, after mom and dad would probably meet Mr. Laritate and he'll tell them how you failed your last test."

She glared at him. "I passed the test."

He scoffed.

"I studied."

He laughed.

"Fine! I answered all As. Whatever. I'll still pass. You'll see." She snarled, taking his hand and pulling him close.

His heart began pounding rapidly at the contact, and his ranting stopped. While he was absorbed in their squabbling, he forgot to notice how beautiful she looked. Was she always this breath-taking?

"I like this song." She commented happily, as another song came on.

"All I need is a rhythm divine...lost in the music, your heart will be mine...all I need is a look in your eyes...viva la music you say you'll be mine..."

He was too busy admiring her to reply. As he spun her around, she was standing with her back facing the glass, with the snow covered buildings in the background, the mixture of diffused sunlight and the disco lights adding a strange hue to her perfect figure. She smiled, closing her eyes and tapping her feet to the music. She hummed the tune, biting her lip.

By that time, the little doubt and hesitation he had left was gone. All he could see was her dark painted lips, with her own teeth sinking into it. How could he possibly hold himself back after that?

He leant in, closer and closer to her face, until she could feel his breath on her nose. He could feel his body temperature rising, he could feel himself losing awareness of what was happening around them. All he could see, feel, hear, smell was her. And now he wanted to taste too.

"I'll go anywhere for you, anywhere you ask me to, I'd do anything for you, anything you want me to. Your love is as far as I can see, it's all I'm ever gonna need..."

Her eyes opened, gleaming with hope and expectation, as she saw how close their faces were.

The minute he saw her looking back at him, all the courage he had mastered was gone. Even though she didn't look like she was mad, or upset, or freaked out, even though she looked like she wanted it as well, he just couldn't find the strength to go ahead. So he smiled and gently pecked her cheek instead. "I love this place. Thanks."

She sighed. She should have known Justin would chicken out in the end. Maybe he still needed more time. "Whatever." She shrugged, smiling back.

"I used to think that dreams were just for sentimental fools. And I'll never find someone that gives the love so true. But I knew the very minute, couldn't live my life without you in it..."

They kept dancing, in perfect sync with each other, as they both reassured themselves that they still had enough time to make a move. One step at a time.

A/N: again, THANK YOU for the amazing reviews. You are my inspiration! I hope you like this chapter. I had a blast writing it :) Please let me know :)

***Chapter 9*: Ch 8: together**

Disclaimer: I do not own the lyrics used, namely, "Don't matter" by Akon

Chapter 8: together

They were home during dinner time, because they both knew the consequences of missing their mother's special dinner at the sub-station. Dinner went as usual- the normal family time, with discussion on one topic. The topic for that night was Justin and Alex- how they were bonding, and how happy everyone was for that. Everyone kept asking them questions about how they spent the evening and how it felt. Alex kept dodging the question with retorts and insults aimed at Justin, while Justin politely replied.

Once it was over, Justin decided to help his mother in washing the dishes, while Alex faked a stomach ache and went upstairs. So he spent one whole hour missing her, thinking about her, and waiting to see her again. His mother kept ranting about her laziness, and he kept smiling in his mind. Everything about her that annoyed him previously now seemed cute. Then again, maybe it was always this way and he never paused to realize that?

When his work was done, Justin teleported back to his room, thoroughly exhausted, yet happy because of the lovely evening they had passed together, and excited of what was awaiting. He wasn't sure what exactly was waiting, he wasn't sure what he wanted to wait, all he knew was that he wanted Alex.

He opened the door to his room, to find it was dark. Did she fall asleep already? He knew she never waited up for him, he didn't expect her to wait up either, but he would have really liked it if she did. Or maybe she actually had that stomach ache? Maybe she was sick?

He sighed, walking over to his bed, and sitting down on his side. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he realized that the other side of the bed was empty. She wasn't there. He looked around his room in terror, still not finding her. She wasn't in his room!

Justin's heart jumped up in panic, and sunk back down in disappointment. Maybe he did freak her out. Maybe she was going to avoid him for the rest of their lives. Maybe he had messed everything up.

He sighed, lying down on his back, looking blankly at the dark ceiling. Blank was how he felt. Just a few minutes ago he had been so happy. He never imagined his happiness would be shattered like this. His bed had never seemed so empty before either. Just two nights, and she had made her place in it as well. But what bothered him most was his worry over her. Was she alright?

After twisting and turning in his bed for about an hour and trying to ignore the thoughts, Justin gave up. He had to go and talk to Alex, apologize maybe. He had to clean up this mess. He wasn't going to lose his sister just because he fell in love with her.

He got up, walked up to her room and knocked. "Alex?" no response came, and his fear increased. "Alex? Please just let me in!" he pleaded anxiously. When he didn't get a reply, he sighed, turning around and leaving. When he reached his room, he became even more terrified. She didn't do something stupid, did she? He rushed back to her room, and dared to throw the door open. He was shocked to see that she wasn't there either.

So did she sneak out of the house in the middle of the night? Where did she go? And what was he supposed to do? Should he tell his parents?

Justin shook his head. They were probably sleeping, and they were probably used to Alex-sneaking-out by now. He had to do this on his own. He climbed down the stairs, to grab his emergency wizard kit that was hidden in the living room.

And when he reached there, he found her on the couch, sleeping, with the TV open, music playing at a low volume. He realized that she must have fallen asleep while she was watching one of her hard-rock shows, since soft music was playing at that moment.

"No body wanna see us together but it don't matter no, cause I've got it. First we go fight, oh yes we go fight, believe we go fight, fight for our right to love, yeah..."

He rolled his eyes. Why did all the songs he came across lately seem to express what he felt? Or maybe that was how love felt, how every person in love felt? He switched off the TV, and looked down at her. Smiling, he gently stroked her cheek, listening to her snore softly. "Alex?" he whispered softly.

She didn't reply, just kept snoring.

He shook her gently, calling her name a little louder. "Alex?"

She just groaned, rolling over to her other side.

He frowned. As much as he didn't want to wake her up, as much as he wanted to pick her up and carry her upstairs like in all his favorite romantic movies, the fact was, she was heavy, especially with her winter coats on, and if he dropped her by any chance, she was going to kill him. "Alex?" he called again, shaking her more strongly. "Alex! Wake up!"

She punched him on the stomach sub-consciously, squeezing a yelp of pain out of him. That woke her up, and she squinted her eyes open to find him standing in front of her, holding his stomach in his hands. "Oh my gosh, Justin! I didn't do it on purpose." She paused, grinning mischievously. "But I can't say I regret it."

He glared at her. "Come on. It's late."

She shrugged, yawned, got up from the couch, and happily marched up the stairs. He climbed up after her, still in pain.

But when he saw her in his room again, the pain in his stomach instantly disappeared and was replaced by a sweet feeling of butterflies fluttering. No matter what the world said or felt, this was how they were supposed to be. They were supposed to be together. They belonged together.

He lay down beside her, and looked up at her hesitantly. She had already closed her eyes. He cleared his throat, getting her attention. "I had a great time today."

She rolled her eyes. "You're welcome."

He frowned. "Didn't *you* have fun?"

She shrugged, and then huffed. "Like I'll actually say that out aloud!"

He shook his head, ruffling her hair. "I think this", he motioned between them, "is becoming a habit."

She looked up at him in confusion. "Huh?"

"This sleeping together thing." He blurted out, blushing, "I'm going to miss it when I go back to the dorm."

Her heart sank at the mention of that hated word. She frowned at him. "Now, now, don't bring up bad things like that. Let's talk about happy things."

He quirked an eyebrow at her. "Like what?"

She grinned deviously. "Wanna go sky-diving tomorrow?"

He stared at her incredulously. This girl just didn't know to give up! "What are you made of?"

She smacked his arm, still grinning. "Then how about sneaking into the movies? I wanna break my own record."

He shook his head. "We are not doing anything that involves sneaking, flying, teleporting, fighting, lying, blood or fire... and just so we are clear, using magic to get me to do all those things with you is out too."

She glared at him. "Then what do *you* want to do tomorrow?"

"Honestly? Sleep." he admitted, rubbing his forehead. "But I was thinking about shopping, since you still have some money left... you didn't use all the money mom gave you today, right?" he asked skeptically.

She scoffed. "No. But I bet mom will give me some more when I tell her we're going shopping together."

He grinned playfully. "Oh, so that's what it is all about, huh? Extracting money from mom by getting along with me?"

She grinned back, titling her head just as playfully. "Of course! What did *you* think?"

He laughed, pulling her close to him. "Okay, enough of joking. Now tell me seriously, when do you wanna go shopping?"

She thought for a moment. "After lunch maybe? And then we can grab dinner from outside."

He nodded. "Okay then, goodnight."

"I can't believe you've got me into making plans!" She mumbled, snuggling close to him. "Goodnight."

Once her breathing settled into a regular rhythm and he was convinced she was asleep, he looked at her. She looked so beautiful and so innocent when she slept so peacefully. All he could see was her dark, shadowy eyelashes, her rosy cheeks, with her curly locks falling on it, and her smooth lips. It was too hard to resist. He leant in, brushing their lips for one second and pulling back immediately. He observed her carefully. She didn't wake up, did she? She didn't feel anything, right?

Once he was sure that he was safe, Justin licked his lips. Her lips felt so soft, so good against his! As much as he was tempted to kiss her then and there, she was asleep, and he wasn't going to do anything without her consent, he wasn't going to take advantage of her. He sighed, placing his head on top of hers. He would have to man up soon someday.

A/N: first off, HAPPY NEW YEAR in advance! Hope you have a year full of happiness and laughter! :) Also, thank you so much for being a part of my life this year :) thank you for all the amazing reviews! :) I hope you liked this chapter. Let me know.

***Chapter 10*: Ch 9: Campfire kiss**

Chapter 9: campfire kiss

"Justin and I are going shopping today." She informed her mother sweetly and waited for the cash that would surely arrive.

Her mother huffed. "Are you crazy? It's snowing! The roads have been closed!"

"What!" she jumped out of her seat and went to the window. She felt like she had been teleported to Antarctica. As far as her eyes went, it was all white, white, and white. There was not a single person or car on the road. "Damn", she muttered, sitting back down at her seat. "Now I'm stuck at home." That was not the only thing bothering her though. She was upset that she would not get to spend the day alone with him. She didn't want to share him with anyone, not even her own family.

"It's not that bad." Justin consoled, patting her hand and grinning slyly. "Now we can all sit down and talk about which college Alex should go to!"

She gasped at the unexpected advent of this topic, and kicked him hard under the table. "I'm thinking about going to Justin's college." she smiled sweetly.

Justin scoffed. "They'd never take you in mine."

She grinned. "Sure they will! I am a cheerleader, remember?"

That thought gave him hope. The prospect of her joining him in college thrilled him. Now he could get to live with her again. If she could get into his college, they could be together all the time!

He simply shrugged and let the topic slide.

They spent the whole afternoon watching movies on his laptop. Max tagged along unfortunately, but since he lived in his own little world, he wasn't a major problem. After lunch, they decided to sit down and play some civilized family games. The fighting began within fifteen minutes and so they had to abandon that and just watch TV. "What place is that?" she whispered, motioning to the scene playing on the TV.

"Australia", Justin whispered back. Alex nodded, and began to frame pictures of a vacation. Well, that was as much as she could do.

It was evening, and she was bored, tired, disappointed. The only good thing was that Justin was sitting next to her. But then again, she couldn't cuddle him with the family nearby, and that was a total suffering.

"Hey I have an idea!" Justin announced suddenly.

"Oh my gosh", Alex whined. It was cold, it was snowing, she couldn't go shopping, she had to waste the whole day in full-on-family-mode, she didn't get to make any progress with Justin. And now on top of all these, she would have to go through the torture his brilliant ideas brought!

"Let's light a campfire in the terrace." He suggested, smiling.

Her ears perked up at the mention of the world campfire. Campfire and the family vacation had become synonymous. The time they spent together at the rain forest was possibly the best time of their life, and sitting in front of the campfire was the best memory. She smiled instantly. "I'm in."

"Me too!" Max raised his hand up. "Can I bring my mouse-trap? Wait, what are we talking about?"

Jerry shook his head. "Oo, let me order some pizza!" he jumped up excitedly and reached for the phone. Theresa gave in without argument. Harper was never one to protest.

When the opened the door to the terrace, they found that it was covered with snow. "How do we light a campfire here?" Justin cried. "This is hopeless. This will never happen."

Alex rolled her eyes at him, and took out her wand out. "Snow, snow, snow, to Australia you go." The snow disappeared and she smiled proudly.

Justin stared at her in disbelief. "What did you just do?"

She tilted her side to a side. "I just ended your hopeless problem?" she coughed into her hands. "Loser."

Justin shook his head. "You sent snow to Australia in *summer*!" he exclaimed.

Alex gasped. "It's summer there? Wow. Hey, why don't we just teleport to-"

Before she could even complete, her mother yanked the wand out of her hand. "No more magic."

She grumbled, but sat down without protesting.

And so the entire family plus Harper was crowding around the campfire and telling embarrassing stories of their childhood. This was officially the worst evening of Alex's life. Once they had finished eating dinner, she couldn't *wait* for her family to leave.

Harper was the first to leave. She bid them goodbye when Zeke called and went back to her room. Max was easy. She just reminded him of the cartoon playing on TV.

Their parents kept staring at each other and it didn't look like they were leaving anytime soon, but as it got cold, they did. "Come on", they motioned to the kids.

Alex smirked at Justin evilly. "The first one in loses 50 dollars."

Justin gulped. He really needed 50 dollars but then-"Oh", he breathed, catching on to her thoughts, "you're on."

Theresa ranted about how ridiculous this was and how they would surely catch a cold, but gave up eventually. And so they were finally alone. On the terrace. In front of a campfire. The most romantic thing ever, even she had to admit.

He looked at her in concern and cleared his throat. "You warm enough?"

She shook her head, biting her lip. It was like the Caribbean night, all over again. Expect, this time, no one was in danger. And this time they were in love.

"Brings back memories?" he asked softly.

She nodded, shifting close to him sub-consciously.

"Earlier, you said you would get into my college." He whispered, staring at her. "Why my college?"

She shrugged. "I thought that would make you mad.... Did it?"

He sighed. *Man up Justin*. He knew it was the perfect time to confess. "No." he admitted, "I would actually be happy to have you stay with me." he breathed, looking at her in anticipation of her reaction.

She gently placed her head on his shoulder. "I want to say I don't want that, but I can't lie right now..."

He laughed, shaking his head at her. "Decided which subject you would take yet?"

She shook her head. "I'm still confused between art and fashion. But don't worry, I'll think of something."

He nodded, letting out another sigh. He loved the way she looked in the light of the campfire- so petite, so beautiful, so mesmerizing, so breath-taking. Even when she was covered from neck to toe, she looked just stunning, just amazing. His heart began beating so rapidly he was sure she could hear it. *Man up Justin*.

She stood still, just waiting and wondering. How was she going to change the topic of conversation to them? Should she make a move or should she wait for him? Well, if she took the lead in everything else in their lives, why should this be any different?

"I know what I want for Christmas" he blurted out at one breath, beating her to it.

She tilted her head to look at him and quirked up an eyebrow. "Another action figure?" she teased.

He was almost tempted to chicken out and say yes, but he didn't. "No", he breathed out with much difficulty. "It's something

else."

"Okay." She shrugged uncertainly.

"Promise me you won't hate me first." He pleaded, taking her hand in his.

Her heart sped up as she heard the words. Was he going to confess? Was he going to say he loved her? Was he going to ask her out? She kept thinking, while she stared back into his eyes. Realizing he was still waiting for her answer, she blew out the breath that she had been holding back and smiled softly at him. "I promise."

He breathed a sigh of relief at those words, and willed himself to move closer, not breaking eye contact with her. He couldn't see any trace of fear or anything she suggested she was feeling uncomfortable. "Promise me you'll stop me if you don't want this." He breathed out nervously. He didn't want to stop, he really didn't, but he knew he had to if this wasn't what she wanted.

The smell of his cologne intoxicated her. She gave his hand a reassuring squeeze, reading his mind. "I promise", she replied, a bit impatiently. She was tired of waiting.

And then his face was so close to hers that her breath hitched. Their noses bumped softly, and he took in a deep breath. He stared into her eyes, and she stared right back, with just as much passion and intensity. He brought his lips closer to hers, and she could feel his breath on her skin. It made her heart-beat quicken even more.

And then his lips brushed against hers softly, ever so slightly. Her eyelids fluttered shut at the feeling- soft, smooth, gentle, caring, everything Justin. He pulled back tentatively and looked at her eyes, only to find they were closed. "Alex?" he asked fearfully.

"Don't" she growled in a dangerously low tone. "Don't Stop! Don't ruin this moment, you moron!"

He breathed out in relief at hearing those words. Now he was sure she wanted this too. And he was sure she would kill him if he wrecked it. So he allowed his lips to brush against hers again, and this time, he found her kissing him back softly. They kept it a surface kiss, lingering for a few seconds. He pulled back after that, bringing his hand up to cup her cheek, while he brushed his nose against her other cheek. His other hand went up to her hair, entwining in her locks.

"Justin", she whined impatiently. Her heart was out of control by that moment. She was finally getting what she had been waiting for after such a long time. There was the thrill of feeling Justin so close to her. And there was the fear of someone walking out and catching them. The mixture of both was sending her into overdrive, and though she loved every moment of this, she didn't think she could keep up much longer with his slow pace.

He nodded his head, brushing his lips with hers once again, this time, gently sweeping his tongue across her bottom lip.

Her mouth opened instantly and a shiver shot through her spine. Her head rolled back, and she let out a groan. "What are you waiting for, dork?" she snarled impatiently when he didn't do anything, "Someone to hold a banner that says Go ahead Justin? Or maybe a-"

He placed his lip back on hers, shushing her effectively. "Shhhh", he said authoritatively, taking a small bite on her upper lip.

She moaned out before she could stop herself. "Have you been going around kissing random college girls?"

He shook his heads in disapproval, and tightened his hold on her hair. "Stop teasing me, or I'll stop kissing you." He warned.

She managed to huff. "This is your definition of a kiss?"

He placed his lips on hers again, this time, much more forcefully. "No. *This* is my definition of a kiss." He muttered, before sweeping his tongue right into her mouth as soon as she opened it to protest. His hand moved down to the small of her back. Even with all the winter coats on, he could feel her skin burning against his. He kept his eyes open, imprinting every second in his memory. In the light of the campfire, she was the hottest thing ever.

Her brain stopped working the minute she felt his tongue entering her mouth, and she was sure she couldn't come up with retorts even if she wanted to. All she felt was his tongue. His tongue on her tongue, teasing it and forcing it to dance with his, his tongue on her jaws, making her shiver. His hand rubbing up and down her back ever so subtly wasn't doing anything to soothe her passion either.

She, for her part, wrapped her hands on his hair, tugging on them tightly, and he grunted into her mouth.

When he finally pulled back, they were both panting for air. "Wow." Justin breathed, mirroring her thoughts.

She shook her head, blinking, still not able to recuperate. "That was.... Wow." She repeated.

Once they were able to catch their breathes, he pulled her close to him. "I'm sorry."

"I am not." She stated flatly. "But I am sorry that we wasted our lives not doing this."

He shook his head at her, but smiled hopefully. "So... you want to keep doing this?"

"Right now I need some air", she said reluctantly, "But later, hell yeah."

His eyes filled with tears. He had finally got her. She was finally his. He hugged her tightly, letting his tears flow.

She patted his shoulder, even as she shot back an insult. "I'm going to nickname you crybaby if you keep being so corny all the time."

"It's my allergies!" he protested immediately, pulling back from her after some time.

A sneaky grin crept into her face. "Hey Justin?"

"Yeah."

"Now that we are... you know... *doing this*..." she paused, biting her lip in a teasing way, "You'll do anything to make me happy, right?"

He smiled at her. "Yeah, of course, Alex. What do you want?"

Her grin widened. "Wanna go sky-diving tomorrow?"

A/N: this was probably the most detailed description of a kiss I've ever written :P plus this was a really long chapter. hope you liked it. Please review. Oh, and thank you for all the amazing reviews :)

***Chapter 11*: Ch 10: Back to the way it was**

Chapter 10: back to how it was...

"This is not weird at all", Alex mumbled, snuggling close to Justin on the bed. After what had happened between them, suddenly, being this close to him seemed a little... weird. Not uncomfortable though, not weird in a bad way. Just weird in a way that everything new seemed weird.

"It is a little weird." Justin acknowledged. "But we'll get used to this soon." He said firmly. He was going to do whatever it took to make this thing between them work.

Alex nodded, smiling at him. "So, umm.... Goodnight then?"

"Goodnight." Justin greeted back, shifting away. Suddenly he wasn't sure if being that close to Alex was a good idea. He wasn't sure what he was going to do. More importantly, he was scared of what *she* was going to do. Knowing her, she would just jump in as fast as she could, as deep as she could, and that was not what he had planned. That was not he wanted, he believed in 'slow and steady wins the race'. He knew that if this had to work, they had to take this slow. One step at a time. "I have a surprise for you tomorrow." He said, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Thanks for the heads up", Alex grinned evilly. "I'll carry some aspirin."

Justin frowned, shaking his head, but then smirked at Alex. "I guess I may need those." He made a 'whoوو' sound, grinning at her. "Nice burn, huh? Sweet."

She rolled her eyes, snuggled closed to him, kicked him till he stopped struggling, and went to sleep. Justin's holidays lasted that long, as she was going to enjoy this closeness while it was still there.

He smiled, watching her sleep, and placed a soft kiss on her forehead. "I will never hurt you...."

Her mouth hung open when she saw where Justin had teleported them to. "Sky-diving?"

Justin shrugged. "You wanted to go sky-diving. I wanted to make you happy. So..."

She shook her head. "No. no no! This is the part where you were supposed to freak out!"

He stared at her in disbelief and confusion. "What?"

She bit her lip, sighing. "I... I don't want to go sky-diving. I just saw it on TV and... I said it cause I thought it'd make you freak out! You know I love to see you freak out! Why aren't you freaking out?" she poked him with her finger, demanding an answer.

His mouth fell open as he heard what she said. So all this persistent suggestion was just another of her schemes to annoy him? "Really? I spent all of my money for nothing?"

"Not for nothing!" she said, smiling. "See, you're mad at me. Don't you feel better?"

He shook his head at her incredulously. "How does your brain work?" he looked at the sky-diving site just once. He would never say it, but he was actually glad that they canceled this plan. He had never wanted to go sky-diving. Sky-diving was not for a guy who was scared of ponies and singing in the shower, AKA, him. He was scared of the slightest physical injury, and he was scared of dying. But then again, he was ready to die for her, so he agreed to go along with her plans. "Come on Alex", he tugged on her hand, motioning for her to move.

"No, Justin", she resisted, making him stop. "We need to talk."

He bit his lip. He had never heard he'd hear those words from Alex, and now that he did, he had no idea if this was good or bad. He hoped it wasn't bad, because just when everything was alright, he didn't want things to get screwed. "Yeah?" he asked tentatively.

"I want us to be the way we were before." She said softly. "I... I don't want to be all sweet and nice to you... I want to drive you crazy. I want to see you cry when I burn your Jim-Bob junk-"

"-That was you?" He screamed.

"See?" she pointed at him. "This is how I want us to be. Now that we are...." She cleared her throat, cringing at actually having to say the word. Doing it was one thing, acknowledging that they were doing this was another. "...dating, I don't want anything to change."

He paused a while, taking in everything she had changed, and then smiled. They had grown up like this, changing their ways wouldn't be possible. "Alex, I don't think we can change even if we want to..."

She smiled back at him, pecking his lips softly. "Thanks Justin." She tugged on his hand, moving forward.

He followed, setting a glare on her. "You owe me a big explanation for setting my Captain Jim Bob special edition alarm clock to fire."

She simply waved her hand non-chalantly. "I hate alarms."

"ALEX!"

31 December...

The perfect mixture of sweet and snarky- that was how their relationship was. And that was how the small vacation was for them. Fighting and hugging, teasing and kissing, shouting and snuggling- opposites never seemed sweeter.

"I can't believe you have to go back", Alex whispered, standing in the balcony and looking at the stars, something she never really liked before Justin happened. "Do you really have to get back so soon?" she pouted, sounded like a little child.

He sighed sadly, placing his hand gently over his and patting it. "I'm sorry Alex, but I have to... you know my college starts day after tomorrow."

"Stupid college", Alex cursed under her breath.

"Alex", he warned. "You really need to watch your language. You're going to spoil Max someday. Good luck explaining to him what the expletives mean."

She chuckled at the image that brought to her mind. But then, the sadness of Justin leaving sunk in back again. She sighed, placing her head on his shoulder. "I got used to living with you again.... this will hurt again..."

He sighed, wrapping his hand around her. "It's hard for me too... but this is how life is.... Look at it from the brighter side."

She snorted. "What can possibly be the brighter side of not being with you?" Except the does and don'ts, she thought in her mind.

He smiled, gently stroking her hair. "Well, we realized we loved each other in my absence. We understood how much we meant to each other. Absence was necessary for us. Who knows, maybe we'll learn something valuable again!"

She scoffed. "Maybe you'll finally learn not to answer the phone 'yello'."

"That is a very unique greeting." He protested, pulling back from her, taking her hands in his. "But if you hate it so much.... I guess I can set it as my caller tune."

She narrowed her eyes at him. "You wouldn't."

He shrugged, grinning happily. "Feel better?" he asked softly, stroking her cheeks. One thing he had discovered was how his soft touches soothed her. He never expected her to be someone who responded to anything gentle.

She nodded, blinking. "A bit.... Thanks Justin."

He smiled at her, cupping her cheeks. "I love you...." He breathed.

She stared up at him in surprise, looking into his eyes to try to see if she heard that right. "What?"

He bit his lip in panic. "Was that too soon?"

"Yeah", she admitted, "But I really wanted to hear that..."

"Really?" his hopes rose up again. So maybe she didn't completely freak out? So maybe she loved him too? "Aren't you going to say it back?"

She shrugged, " Okay." She took in a deep breath, and gulped nervously. Saying this was much more difficult than she thought it would be. "I love you too... dork."

He smiled happily, and hugged her as tightly as possible. She hugged back just as tightly. She did not want to let go, she did not want to let him go back to his dorm, away from her. She wanted to be with him, for as long as possible, forever and ever.

"Please don't wake me up tomorrow morning. I want to sleep through the goodbye this time, see how that works out." She whispered softly when they pulled apart.

He nodded, turning around to see the fireworks.

She shoved him with her elbow. "Tell me you're not thinking what I think you're thinking. Cause that'd be incredibly sappy."

He shrugged, turning around to face her again. "You know, it's not good to judge something without trying it first." He stated playfully.

She placed her hands on his shoulders. "Let's try it then", she grinned, standing up on her tiptoes to reach him.

"I'll miss you", he whispered sadly, as he looked into her eyes, shining with her unshed tears and the reflection of the fireworks in them.

"I'll miss you too", she whispered, before crashing her lips on his.,

A/N: that is it. Watch out for the epilogue. Hope you liked this chapter. Let me know what you think :) thanks everyone! You guys are amazing!

***Chapter 12*: Epilogue**

Epilogue

When Justin left, she was miserable. The room seemed emptier than before; the house seemed even bigger, and silence had never seemed so deafening. She would stare at the doors like he would walk in anytime; she would turn around like she was expecting to see him. She cried a lot for the first two days, even though he called five times an hour to make sure she was alright. She could tell he had been crying too, no matter how he tried to hide it, and that made her feel happy and sad at the same time- happy that he missed her just as much, and sad that he was in just as much pain.

They had gone to a long distance relationship. At first, she was skeptical about this. She was scared, especially since her long distance relation with Dean didn't work. But she was young then, and that wasn't love, and most importantly, that wasn't Justin.

Because with Justin, distance seemed like an abstract concept. His voice seemed tangible, almost like a physical presence. He would call her in the morning to wake her up with a "I-love-you", and put a smile on her face right from the beginning of the day. He would text her at least every hour, telling her anything and everything, from how much he got for his assignment, to what color his roommate had dyed his hair, to how he forgot to tie his shoe-laces and fell down. She, on her part, texted him about all her evil schemes and their successful results. During the day, he called her up as many times as he could, but sometimes, with study pressure, it wasn't possible. But he made sure he called her every night. That was their prime talk time; they would talk for hours on the end. He would end every day with "I love you Alex". The web-chat continued till Alex broke her laptop, and then Justin began magically teleporting to her room to see her. Each visit lasted just five minutes, but it was a magical five minutes. Sometimes they would talk, sometimes they would just hug, and sometimes she would kiss him crazy.

Life was perfect, even in his absence.

-The end

A/N: this story is completed. Thank you so much for all your support! Thank you for all the hits (story stats is down, so I don't know the exact number), 47 alerts, 26 favorites, 221 reviews. You guys are amazing! Thank you so much! I hope you liked this story! Please review and let me know your final thoughts :)

Now, what is next? "These facts of life." apart from the apocabigbang fic, that is going to be my last jalex multi-chapter. I know, some of you will ask why I'll stop writing jalex, so I'll tell you all my reasons:

- 1. I'll be busy this year. I can't focus so much on fanfics.**
- 2. I think I have written more than enough jalex. XD**
- 3. I like experimenting with new things. I want to explore other fandoms.**
- 4. I'm out of jalex ideas. I'm running out of scenes and dialogs.**

Just to be clear, I'm not going any where soon. I'm still here till April-May. I thought I should tell you guys sooner :)